

TFM Completion Agreement Procedures

For the Bureau of Land Management

These procedures are intended to provide internal guidance on the enforcement of the Technical Fire Management (TFM) Student Completion Agreement.

Background

The TFM training program is significant to the Government's interest in terms of time commitment and cost. It is approximately 18 months long including 440 classroom hours and approximately 250-500 non-classroom hours. The cost for tuition, travel and per diem is approximately \$26,000 per student. The tuition alone is currently \$8,400.

The student signs an agreement to complete the entire training program. The agreement states that "Due to the nature of this educational opportunity, a student who does not successfully complete the course and final project will be required to repay the amount expended." The student's supervisor and the district Line Officer also sign the agreement ensuring the student's time commitment and management support has been discussed and agreed upon.

These procedures will provide consistent policy for "pursuing the repayment of training costs" to protect the Government's interests when students fail to complete the TFM program. The Government is obligated to ensure that limited funds for fire management training are expended in the most effective manner. To protect the Government's interests when students fail to complete the TFM program, these procedures will provide a consistent framework which will avoid any arbitrary or capricious actions when pursuing the recovery of training costs.

Legal Authority

Federal employee training is governed by 5 U.S.C. § 4101-4119. The Office of Personnel and Management have promulgated regulations under this act at 5 C.F.R. part 410. Under 5 C.F.R. § 410.303 employees are responsible for "successfully completing and applying authorized training." If the employee fails to fulfill the agreement, the agency can recover costs consistent with 5 U.S.C § 4108 and 5 C.F.R. § 410.405.

Successful Completion Requirements

Students must achieve each of the following within the allocated timeframes in order to successfully complete TFM. Not meeting any of the following standards will constitute "failure to complete." Students who fail to complete TFM are subject to liability for the reimbursement to the agency for its costs. To complete the TFM Program, a student must:

- 1) Successfully complete each classroom module with an overall combined score of 70 percent ("C" grade) or better. A student may successfully complete an individual module with a grade of "D" but the average score for all classroom modules must be 70 percent ("C" grade) or better for successful program completion. An "F" grade for

any of the classroom modules will constitute "failure to complete" that module and the TFM program; and

- 2) Present the final project to an interagency review panel and the final project passes with no edits required; or
- 3) Present the final project to an interagency review panel and the project passes with edits required for successful completion. The edits required by the panel need to be incorporated into the final project and returned to Washington Institute (the vendor) within one year for approval.

The TFM program is designed to be 18 months long. All the classroom hours are completed within the first 12 months. The classroom sessions include five 2-week modules and one 1-week module. The seventh module (Final Project) requires no classroom hours. Instead, the student is given six months to complete and present a final project to an interagency review panel.

Requests for Extensions

A student may request an extension of one year to complete his/her final project and present that project to an interagency panel. A TFM student will NOT automatically be granted an extension. The following request of extension process also pertains to students who wish to extend their deadline for completing any required edits of their final project paper after the one year time period has expired.

A TFM student who needs to process a request for an extension must:

1. Speak with the BLM TFM Advisory Committee representative concerning this issue.
2. Gain concurrence from his/her immediate supervisor.
3. Submit a formal letter stating their request to their TFM Advisory Committee representative outlining the reason(s) for the request. This letter must be signed by the student, student's supervisor, and Line Officer.

Project extension requests will be granted only under extraordinary circumstances that are outside the student's control. Extension requests are intended for students that have unforeseeable and unavoidable circumstances that prevent them from completing TFM on time. They may include, but are not limited to, health problems, family emergencies, etc. It is not the intent to grant project extensions for students who simply do not make completing TFM a high priority. If the request is approved, the Advisory Committee representative shall:

1. Sign the formal request letter and forward a copy to Washington Institute.
2. Contact Washington Institute via telephone to ensure the letter has been received and duly noted in the student's file.

Appealing the Failure to Complete

Students who fail to complete TFM will have an opportunity to delay the billing for repayment for one year only by submitting a plan addressing the items listed below.

- 1) Submit an electronic or hardcopy request to the BLM Training Unit program manager for TFM within 15 consecutive days of receiving notification of "failure to complete" with a plan to present another final paper within the next year.
- 2) The plan must provide a timeframe to adhere to for the completion of the final project. The final paper elements such as, problem statement, objectives, decision criteria, alternatives, selection of alternative or solution should be addressed with target due dates in the plan.
- 3). The BLM Training Unit program manager for TFM will correspond with Washington Institute, TFM faculty, the student's supervisor, and the student when considering how reasonable the plan is and if it meets the timeframe requirements to present the final paper the following year.

Billing for "Failing to Complete"

Failure to complete will result in billing. The BLM Training Unit program manager for TFM will notify the employee no later than 30 consecutive days of receiving the notice of "failure to complete" from Washington Institute.

When it is determined by the BLM Training Unit program manager for TFM that the student has "failed to complete" TFM, the student will be billed for the cost of each module they failed and not the total tuition cost which is currently \$8,400. Considering there are seven modules including the final presentation, the cost per module is currently \$1200.

Waiver Requests for Billing

Waivers are intended for students that have unforeseeable and unavoidable circumstances that prevent them from ever completing TFM. They include, but are not limited to, health problems, family emergencies, etc. Generally, waivers are granted in situations that are completely outside the control of the employee. It is not the intent to grant waivers for students that simply do not make completing TFM a high priority.

Students must submit in writing why they are requesting a waiver for billing. They must provide details regarding their reason and why it was outside their control. The BLM Training Unit program manager for TFM will consider the request and provide a written decision within 30 consecutive days.